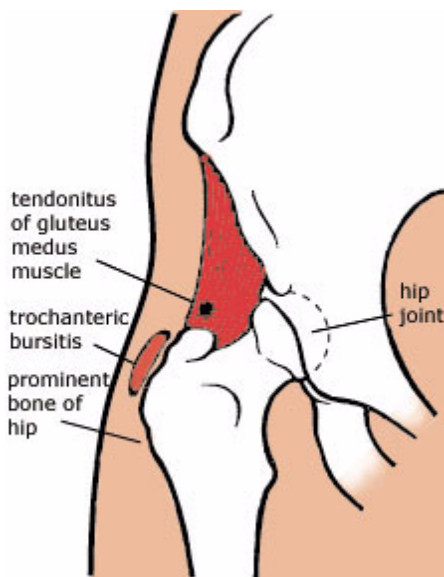


Bursitis and tendonitis of the outer hip

Painful inflammation of the outer hip area at the top of the thigh is a very common cause of disability in middle-aged people. The problem occurs at the trochanteric area of the hip—the greater trochanter is the outer bony prominence of the upper thigh. The muscles of the buttock attach to this bone by tendons and there is a protective shock absorber over the bone, called a bursa. These areas are prone to inflammation similar to tendonitis and bursitis around the shoulder joint and elbow.

What are trochanteric bursitis and tendonitis?

These are painful localised inflammations of the bursa (bursitis) or the tendon where it joins the bone (tendonitis). It may be difficult for your doctor to tell the difference and, if necessary, special X-rays may be needed to do this. Both conditions may be present at the same time. The problem tends to get misdiagnosed as osteoarthritis of the hip.



Who gets the problem?

Although it can occur in young adults and the elderly, it is a feature of middle-aged women, especially in those who have taken up extra walking, jogging, gardening or a sporting activity such as tennis.

What are the symptoms?

The main symptom is pain on the outside of the hip which can be referred down the outside of the leg as far as the foot. The pain can be very persistent and severe and affects one's lifestyle. A feature of bursitis is pain at night and the patient finds it very painful to lie on the affected side because of the tenderness.

What is the cause?

The main cause appears to be a friction effect over the bursa area due to excessive walking or similar activity. People with a tendency to walk with in-toeing (pigeon toes) are more likely to get bursitis. A common cause is strain on the gluteal muscles of the back, due to the habit of straightening the back after bending it forwards but with the knees kept straight.

What is the treatment?

The first thing to do is stop or reduce the activity causing it, such as sport, long walks and gardening. When walking, it is helpful to use an out-toeing (Charlie Chaplin) type of gait. You should learn to bend your knees before bending your back. Avoid sleeping on the affected side and sleep with a small pillow under the buttock on that side.

The best exercises are knee-chest exercises to stretch the gluteal muscles for up to 10 minutes a day and also stretching the straight leg over the side of a bed (a weight around the ankle helps). For severe persistent pain, an injection of a local anaesthetic mixed with a safe cortisone agent into the tender area is very effective. Very rarely, surgery may be needed to excise the bursa or repair the tendon.